

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 3, 2017

The Honorable Arthur A. Elkins, Jr.
Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Inspector General
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

The Honorable Mary L. Kendall
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Peggy E. Gustafson
U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of Inspector General
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Paul K Martin
NASA Office of Inspector General
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The Honorable April Stephenson
U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Inspector General
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The Honorable Allison Lerner
National Science Foundation
Office of Inspector General
4201 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1135
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The Honorable Daniel R. Levinson
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Office of Inspector General
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Hubert Bell
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of the Inspector General
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Inspectors General,

We write to you out of our deep concern that the scientific integrity of our nation's research and development agencies be maintained by the Trump Administration. As an Inspector General for such an agency, we urge you to remain vigilant against threats to scientific integrity and independence at the agency you oversee.

The new administration has, on numerous occasions, articulated viewpoints that run counter to mainstream scientific thought - for instance on the issue of climate change. Those viewpoints are not a valid basis to harass, intimidate, or undermine the tens of thousands of dedicated public servant scientists who work for the federal government.

News reports during the Presidential transition period have highlighted specific areas of concern that we expect you will monitor in your capacity as Inspector General. First, on December 9, the

Washington Post reported¹ that the Trump transition team submitted a detailed questionnaire to Department of Energy (DOE) employees seeking various information, such as their professional society memberships and the names of employees who had worked on specific projects, including projects related to climate change.² The article went on to cite an Energy Department official who called the 74-question form:

“a hit list and said Trump’s team appears to be going after top scientists and employees who work on subjects ranging from the Iran nuclear deal to the internal operations of the national energy labs... The official said questions about professional society memberships and websites that staff at the Energy Department’s national laboratories maintain or contribute to could raise questions about Trump’s commitment to scientific independence – a fundamental tenet at the agency.”

While a transition spokesperson subsequently attempted to downplay the questionnaire, these types of questions are troubling in that they appear to target scientists and other individuals based on their areas of expertise and the findings of their scientific work.

The actions at DOE, unfortunately, do not appear to be an outlier. Members named to the transition team at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have a long history of harassing climate scientists. Two reported members of the EPA transition team, David Schnare of E&E Legal and Chris Horner of the Competitive Enterprise Institute,³ have used open records requests laws to harass mainstream climate scientists. The fact that individuals like Mr. Schnare and Mr. Horner were put into leadership roles for the EPA transition does not inspire confidence that the administration will respect the rights of the many scientists in the agency to work free from harassment by political appointees or that the agency will maintain an atmosphere fostering open exchange of ideas.

Another issue that has been reported on during the transition is data retention and continuity. The Washington Post reported in December that climate scientists are organizing to copy government climate data onto private servers to safeguard the data from being interfered with or deleted during the Trump Administration.⁴ Another story from Politico noted that researchers are copying “Obamacare” data in case those data are hidden or deleted in the new administration.⁵

We share the concerns of the scientific community that public access to federal scientific data could be limited or curtailed by the new administration. Even the disruption of continuous data

¹ *Trump transition team seeks details on Energy Dept. Workers* Washington Post (Dec. 9, 2016). (online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/trump-transition-team-seeks-details-on-energy-dept-workers/2016/12/09/3a4aeab2-be4b-11e6-ae79-bec72d34f8c9_story.html?utm_term=.40c75a2b13b2).

² *Questions for DOE*, Document (online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/apps/g/page/politics/questions-posed-by-president-elect-trumps-transition-team-to-energy-department-officials/2143/>).

³ *Agency’s FOIA adversary now on the inside*, Greenwire (December 12, 2016), *These are the climate myths guiding Trump’s EPA team*, Washington Post (December 13, 2016) (online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/12/13/these-are-the-climate-myths-guiding-trumps-epa-team/>).

⁴ *Scientists are frantically copying U.S. climate data, fearing it might vanish under Trump*, Washington Post (December 13, 2016) (online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/12/13/scientists-are-frantically-copying-u-s-climate-data-fearing-it-might-vanish-under-trump/>).

⁵ *Researchers race to copy Obamacare data for fear it will vanish*, Politico (December 21, 2016) (online at <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/obamacare-health-data-trump-232869>).

sets, such as climate data sets, could significantly affect their efficacy because they derive much of their value from their continuity.

Scientific data collected or produced by the federal government are a public good. In many cases, these data were produced at great expense to the U.S. taxpayers. Information and data should be protected no less vigorously than real property owned by the federal government. Inspectors General have a key oversight role to ensure these public resources are protected from potential political interference.

Inspectors General are provided with broad powers to act within their agencies to hold officials accountable for their compliance with the law. You play a critical role in the effort to safeguard taxpayers' interests in ensuring a sound and effective government. The U.S. has long been recognized as the world's leader in science and technology, largely due to sustained federal investments in research and development. As the new administration takes power, we expect that you will devote your attention and considerable resources to ensuring that all federal agencies maintain their high standards of scientific integrity and independence that are essential to our nation's continued global leadership in science and technology.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

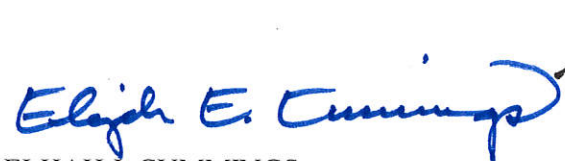
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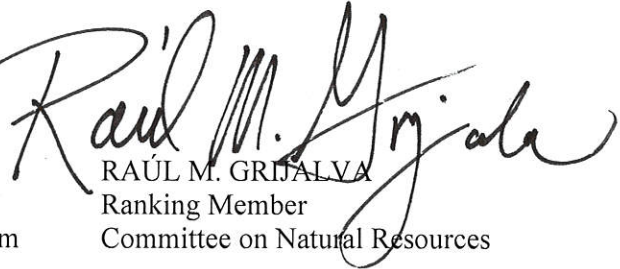
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